

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Sixmile Land Banking Sale
Proposed Implementation Date:	March 2008
Proponent:	Montana DNRC
Location:	NENE Section 14 T15N, R22W
County:	Missoula

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Offer for sale at public auction, 40 acres of state land currently held in trust for the benefit of the MSU 2nd Grant Trust. Revenue generated from the sale of these parcels would be deposited in a special account used to purchase replacement lands meeting acquisition criteria related to legal access, productivity, potential income generation and potential for multiple use. The new parcel/parcels would then be held in trust for the benefit of the MSU 2nd Grant Trust. This proposed sale is being initiated through the Land Banking Program (Montana Code Annotated 77-2-361) that was approved by the Legislature in 2003. The purpose of this program is to allow the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to dispose of parcels that are primarily isolated and produce low income and allow the Department to purchase land with legal public access that can support multiple uses and will provide a rate of return equal to or greater than the parcels that were sold. Additionally, this program allows for the Trust land portfolio to be diversified, by disposing of grazing parcels that make up a majority of the Trust land holdings and acquire other types of land, such as timberlands, which typically produce greater return on investment.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

A letter, requesting comments be submitted by April 10, 2008, was sent to interested parties including adjacent landowners, the Missoula County Commissioners, Land Board members, legislators, government agencies, special interest groups and others. A complete list of the individuals contacted is included as an attachment to this EA.

A public notice was published in the Missoulian on March 11, 2008, Mineral Independent and the Clark Fork Valley Press on March 12, 2008 requesting comments be submitted by April 9, 2008.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

None.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Proposed Alternative A: Offer 40 acres of State Land for sale at public auction and subject to statutes addressing the sale of State Land found in M.C.A. 77-2-301 et seq. Proceeds from the sale would be deposited in the Land Bank Fund to be used in conjunction with proceeds from other sales for the purchase of other State Land, easements, or improvements for the beneficiaries of the respective trusts, in this case the MSU 2nd Grant Trust. If a sale is consummated, the State would not be able to control the type of future development or activities that could occur on the surface estate. However, per M.C.A. 77-2-304 the State would retain the subsurface mineral rights.

No Action Alternative: Defer inclusion of this tract in the Land Banking Program.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

No sites with unique geology or unstable slopes were identified on the parcel proposed for exchange. Predominant soils are deep Crow silt loams on 4 to 15 percent slopes with higher clay contents in subsoils. These are somewhat poorly drained soils that tend to be droughty and support mixed conifer stands of Douglas-fir and Ponderosa Pine. Erosion potential is low to moderate on these soils with gentle slopes. Historic management has been selective timber harvest and grazing of range sites. No cumulative effects of timber harvest. No EPA Toxic Release Sites or DEQ Remediation sites are located on this parcel. No soil disturbance activities are planned as part of this action.

There would be low risk of direct, indirect and cumulative impacts to geology and soil quality, stability and moisture as a result of implementing the proposed action or no-action alternatives.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

This parcel of land is located approximately 2 miles north of Huson, Montana, within the Six-mile Creek watershed. No streams, surface water features, water points of use or water rights occur on this DNRC parcel. Any proposed water rights uses would require application for a beneficial water use through the permit process administered by the DNRC Water Rights Bureau. No pollution related impairments have been identified for this area. Thus, there is low risk of direct, indirect or cumulative effects to water quality or beneficial uses anticipated with implementation of either the Action or No-Action Alternative on this parcel.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

This parcel of land is located approximately 6 miles west to northwest of Frenchtown, Montana. We do not expect that any direct or cumulative effects to air quality would occur as a result of the sale of this parcel.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

This parcel of land includes one of the cutting units for the Roman Creek Timber Sale which has been sold, however, harvesting has not yet taken place. There is currently approximately 300,000 board feet of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir saw timber on the site. Following the harvest operation, approximately 160,000 board feet of timber will remain. The cutting unit was marked in such a manner as to retain the healthiest and most

vigorous trees on the site. Therefore, the residual stand will retain the same basic species composition albeit at a lower stocking level with healthier trees.

Implementation of the Action Alternative would not change the effects of the Roman Creek Timber Sale upon this parcel, nor would it have direct or cumulative effects upon the residual timber stand.

Noxious weeds, principally Spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*), occur throughout the area across all ownerships, including the DNRC parcel, although in lower density due to the forest overstory. There would be minimal if any change in noxious weeds with the proposed action. We don't expect any direct or cumulative effects would occur to vegetation as a result of the proposal.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

White-tailed Deer Winter Range—The affected parcel is surrounded by housing development and is immediately adjacent to public roads on the north and east. A timber sale was recently sold on the parcel, and is soon to be harvested (Roman-Sixmile Environmental Analysis, DNRC). As such, the timber sale will reduce the capability of the parcel to provide snow intercept/thermal cover for white-tailed deer. Several game trails traverse the parcel, providing a link between forested cover to the north and pastures to the south.

Under the No Action Alternative, no changes from current conditions would be expected.

The proposed action would auction the affected parcel to the highest bidder. Given the level of development in a one mile radius (194 lots), it would be likely that housing development might occur on the affected parcel post-auction. Most lots are currently between 5 and 30 acres. As such, development on the affected parcel would likely follow local development patterns. White-tailed deer continue to utilize many of the developed lots and would likely continue to use the affected parcel, should it be developed post-auction. As a result, there would likely be low risk of direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to white-tailed deer winter range on the affected parcel from the proposed action.

Gray Wolves—The affected parcel is located approximately 4 miles southeast from the edge of the Ninemile wolf pack's home range. Wolves from this pack may explore the Sixmile valley for prey. However, due to the housing density in the area surrounding the affected parcel, wolves would likely encounter many potential conflicts along the way (e.g., domestic dogs, horses, livestock).

Under the No Action Alternative, no changes from current conditions would be expected.

The proposed action would auction the affected parcel to the highest bidder. Given the level of development in a one mile radius (194 lots), it would be likely that housing development might occur on the affected parcel post-auction. Most lots are currently between 5 and 30 acres. As such, development on the affected parcel would likely follow local development patterns. Wolves would likely continue to utilize the affected parcel post-auction. Should the parcel be developed following current land use patterns (4 to 6 lots per 40 acres), there would be a minimal increase in lots within the one mile radius area. As a result, there would likely be low risk of direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to wolves from the proposed action.

There are no streams, and hence, no fisheries within the DNRC parcel. There would be no direct, in-direct or cumulative effects to aquatic life or fish with implementation of the action or no-action alternatives.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

No issues regarding threatened or endangered terrestrial wildlife species were identified.

No fish species, wetlands or sensitive plants occur on the DNRC parcel. There would be no direct, in-direct or cumulative effects to aquatic life or fish with implementation of the action or no-action alternatives.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

It is currently unknown if cultural or paleontologic resources are present in the parcels nominated for sale through the Land Banking Program. However, a Class III inventory for Antiquities will be conducted prior to disposition of any of these tracts.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

No direct or cumulative impact to aesthetics is anticipated as a result of this proposal.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

This 40 acre parcel of school trust land represents a fraction of the 5.2 million acres of trust land statewide. State law and administrative rules, limit the sale of trust land to a maximum of 20,000 acres prior to purchasing replacement lands. The potential sale of these parcels would affect an extremely small percentage of the school trust lands if replacement land was not purchased before the statute expires and even less impact if replacement land is purchased as anticipated.

The potential transfer of ownership would not have any impact or demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

The Environmental Assessment prepared for the Roman-Sixmile Timber Sale contains additional analysis of the existing environment of this parcel.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.</i>• <i>Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.</i>• <i>Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.</i>

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No impacts to human health and safety would occur as a result of this proposal.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

This parcel contains one of the cutting units contained within the Roman-Sixmile Timber Sale. This sale has been purchased by Plum Creek Timber Company and harvesting has not occurred yet. Upon completion of harvesting activities, approximately 140,000 board feet of timber will have been removed. Implementation of the Action Alternative would not affect the harvest of timber within this parcel.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposal would have no effect on quality and distribution of employment.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Currently the parcel is not assessed taxes. Sale of this land would add additional property to the Missoula County tax base, thus increasing revenue to the county.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

The proposed sale would not have an impact on government services.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Any proposal to develop this parcel would be subject to review and approval under state and local regulations.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

As this parcel is limited in size and surrounded by private residences, it provides little in the way of recreational opportunities and does not provide access to any other lands open to recreation.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

The potential sale of this parcel would not require additional housing or change population. It is unknown what land uses would occur under new ownership. Any future proposal to develop the property would be subject to review under state and local regulations.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The potential sale of the state land would not directly or cumulatively impact cultural uniqueness or diversity. It is unknown what management activities would take place on the land if ownership changes.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Land Banking statute requires that land acquired as replacement property through Land Banking is "likely to produce more net revenue for the affected trust than the revenue that was produced from the land that was sold" (Section 77-2-364 MCA). Property considered for acquisition will include cropped or irrigated land, and/or land with recreational, timber, or commercial potential. All these land classifications or uses presently produce a higher rate of return on State Trust land than the average parcel of State Trust grazing land.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Jonathan Hansen	Date: April 24, 2008
	Title: Missoula Unit Manager	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I have selected the proposed alternative A.

In the long term I do not expect this parcel will produce a reasonable return from traditional resource (forest) management activities considering the high asset value of the property. In addition given the small size of the tract (40 acres), and the complexities associated with potential impacts to multiple adjacent residences, management costs are higher than for most lands.

I believe that it is not suitable for traditional land uses the DNRC commonly practices and therefore, it is in the best interest of the agency to divest itself of this parcel.

I recommend the parcel receive preliminary approval for sale and continue with the Land Banking process.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I have evaluated the comments received and potential environment effects and have determined significant environmental impacts would not result from the proposed land sale. This parcel does not have any unique characteristics; critical habitat or environmental conditions indicating the parcel should necessarily remain under management by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

I have reviewed the comments and believe that all concerns have been adequately addressed under the appropriate headings.

If this parcel is sold, all future actions or changes in land use would have to meet with all applicable laws and rules.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Anthony L. Liane
	Title: Area Manager – Southwestern Land Office
Signature: /s/ Anthony L. Liane	
Date: May 2, 2008	